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ABSTRACT

Various aspects of the writing across the curriculum program at Somerset County College (SCC) are discussed in these four presentations. Introductory comments by Myrna Smith trace the development of the writing across the curriculum program at SCC. Angela Bodino's presentation, "Writing as Learning Across the Curriculum", explores the theory of writing as a powerful learning tool which has stimulated the writing-across-curriculum movement in America, focusing on the purposes of writing, the place of writing throughout the curriculum, the special characteristics of writing as a way of learning, correctness in writing, and the role of critics and evaluators in the writing process. Olivia Bissell's presentation, "Who/How/Why/What," describes SCC's 3-year project to involve all 90 faculty members at the college in a series of ten weekly 2-hour workshops so that they could experience process-oriented writing, discover its potential for learning, and use writing for learning in their own classroom. Next, "Lessons of the Project," by Barbara Adams, presents insights drawn from the project, highlighting the importance of collegewide support and involvement; initial emphasis on influencing faculty; faculty experiencing personally the connection between writing and learning and the value of writing in their own discipline; and creating collegewide consensus on acceptable standards of college-level writing. Concluding comments are provided by Myrna Smith. (LAL)

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WRITING FOR LEARNING:

HOW TO ACHIEVE A TOTAL COLLEGE COMMITMENT

With Barbara Adams, Angela Bodino,
Olivia Bissell, and Myrna Smith

Annual Convention of American Association
of Community and Junior colleges
San Diego, CA, April, 1985

JC 850 381

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon. I am Myrna Smith. These are my colleagues Angela Bodino and Olivia Bissell and our Dean of Instruction, Barbara Adams. We are from Somerset County College, a community college located in central New Jersey. Today we want to talk with you about our program for writing across the curriculum.

The most important question underlying our program is this:

> How does a college faculty find ways to teach what it believes to be important for students to learn?

1. Do we look at what we have traditionally done?
2. Do we examine what was important in our own educations?
3. Do we ask what we want an ideal student to be?

Most of us would do all of these and more.

In initiating this project we operated from two assumptions:

1. All faculty agree that students should be able to write
2. The ability to write is important to the study of all disciplines.

This agreement is perhaps easy to secure if only because it is theoretical: practical implementation of these assumptions is more difficult. However, if we accept these assumptions the next question that follows is this: Who is responsible for teaching students to write? Although most faculty require some form of writing in their classes, the prevailing perception regarding the teaching of writing is that it is the responsibility of those trained to teach it -- in other words the English faculty.

If you question your English faculty, you would undoubtedly hear, "Yes, we teach writing in Freshman Composition. Yes, we do have standards. If students are not skilled in writing by the time they reach college, we test and place them in developmental writing courses designed to take care of the deficiencies." But the rest of the faculty would probably respond, "But most of my students can't write."

What we realize from this overwhelming response are principles we as educators know:

1. Students need practice and reinforcement to continue developing an ability.
2. Students need to be shown that abilities acquired in one course are valued and have application in other courses.

If we <u>believe</u> that writing is inseparable from learning and central to the study of all disciplines, it makes sense to activate that <u>belief</u> and to teach writing directly and reinforce it in all courses rather than to teach it as a discrete ability to be learned in a special way.

I am one who believes. So I have proselytized. In my first effort to convince all faculty to integrate writing into their teaching, a colleague and I went around to the major teaching groups and gave a two-hour presentation on how they could use writing in their fields. We presented some theoretical background, suggestions on ways to increase the writing without significantly increasing the work for teachers, and gave examples of assignments that would be satisfactory to various disciplines. About half the faculty attended; the response was favorable; and yes there were a few faculty members who used more writing in their classes, but mostly what we said did not produce change.

Two years later the same faculty member and I asked four individuals, again representing the major divisions at the college, to meet over a semester on our own time to talk about and examine the writing that was being done in their classes. Although the intentions were sound, this project was less successful than the first.

So when Angela asked me a few years ago if I wanted to do a writing-across-the-curriculum project, I didn't respond with the enthusiasm of the uninitiated, but rather with some doubt, said, "Not unless we have institutional support."

Within a year after Barbara Adams came to our college as Dean, she asked for grant proposals that would have institutional impact. Angela and Olivia presented one on forming small groups of faculty across the curriculum with the purpose of changing their attitudes toward writing by writing themselves. I proposed one for English adjunct faculty mainly to look at the current research in writing. Both of us emphasized that we wanted faculty members to become aware of and involved in the process of writing. So Barbara suggested we combine our proposals for a comprehensive writing across the curriculum grant that would include the entire full-time teaching faculty and the English adjuncts. When we were awarded a three-year grant from New Jersey's Fund for the Improvement of Collegiate Education (modeled after the FIPSE program by our Chancellor of Higher Education, Dr. T. Edward Hollander) I had more than what I had thought was a minimal requirement, not only institutional support from our own school but also major funding from the state.

What I want to emphasize is the amount of cooperation and involvement we have had at all levels: from junior faculty members through the dean, the president, Dr. Charles Irace, who is in the audience, to the chancellor.

We began our program in the fall with a day-long program for adjunct English faculty. Although this group was convinced of the value of writng, we wanted them to have some of the same experiences as the students they teach, so we began with an in-class writing assignment. All of us read our selections out loud and lapped up the praise we received from each other. We took that opportunity to stress how important it is to respond positively to student writing and to offer encouragement during the writing process. We then talked about the current research in writing and what that means in our writing courses at our college. We followed up the initial day-long program, with four two-hour meetings, addressing questions such as preparing composition course outlines, developing standards, and grading papers.

As is probably true at most of your schools, we rely heavily on part-time faculty, who may be with us for only one year, for several, or for many. These workshops have served two main purposes: They have made the part-time English teachers feel more integrated into the department, and they have helped hone the skills of persons who may not have experienced the process approach to teaching writing.

Now I would like to introduce my colleague, Angela bodino who will explain what we mean by the process approach to writing.

Writing as Learning across the Curriculum

Angela Bodino

What do you think of when you come across the topic of writing? Perhaps the importance of writing in a complex, modern society where the communication of information is so central and therefore so critical. Perhaps you expect to read in a piece on writing some statistics and some discussion of declining verbal scores on college boards and the fading art of diagramming sentences.

You might respond to the word writing in a more personal way, in private and painful images. Do you recall a wastebasket overflowing with crumpled paper at 3:00 A.M. when the report was due at 9:00 A.M.? Do you think of compositions that were sent out bravely and that came back bleeding! Or when you think of writing do you think of Sister Lucy or Edwin Newman looking over your shoulder for dangling participles, split infinitives, and comma splices?

It's a commonplace that writing is useful, complex, and difficult, but the view of writing being presented here is that it's also intellectually refreshing, and even pleasurable. And that it's a powerful way of learning.

This theory of writing that has stimulated the writing-across-the-curriculum movement in America in the past ten years raises several issues: (1) the purposes of writing, (2) the place of writing across the curriculum, (3) the special characteristics of writing as a way of learning,

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(4) correctness in writing, and (5) the role of critics and evaluators in the writing process.

The Purposes of Writing

The first point is that writing has more than one purpose. It can do more than inform and persuade. We do not write only to communicate to others what we already know. As Peter Elbow explains in Writing without Teachers we write to discover for ourselves what we think. In a sense we have to see what we think in order to know what we think. In a sense writing is thinking made visible. What we're suggesting then is that it's useful to approach writing first as a process of learning and discovery, and secondly as a means of communicating what is already known.

When we're using writing as a process of learning, we may be drafting an essay; we may be speculating on paper in a search for answers. We may be practicing inquiry modes and searching for the right combination of form and insight. On the other hand, when we think of writing as a product, we have a completed essay. We are ready to inform our readers; we've appropriately connected form and information. We've already derived insights and we're ready to present them in exactly the right way. When writing is in process we might appreciate dialogue in response; when the writing is a completed product, we might expect evaluation in response.

When we set the two purposes side by side we see that writing as learning is an open-ended process that's disordered, informal, unedited, speculative, directed to the

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self primarily, or to the reader in dialogue. On the other hand writing as a piece of communication is a completed product that's ordered, formal, polished, informative, directed to others, possibly for evaluation. When we engage in writing as learning we're beginning a creative process, a discovery process, and are holding the critical function in abeyance for a bit. The blank page represents an opportunity for exploration rather than a threat of evaluation.

Such writing for learning is appropriate, even crucial, whenever our students need to think something through or to pursue unexpected connections or to pose questions. Such a speculative role for writing addresses the second point, that writing should be in place <u>across</u> the curriculum and not simply in composition courses

Writing across the Curriculum.

In all courses when students write they are exploring the language of particular disciplines. In political science, students may write speculatively on their notions of what a liberal is or a conservative, to match their personal views with the formal or historical definition of the discipline. They may be asked to synthesize,to compose liberal and conservative perspectives on the budget deficit,and to analyze, to explore reasons for differences. In science, students can record their observations of an experiment, and speculate on the implications of what they see. In philosophy, students may write speculatively on abstractions we seldom explore deeply, although we hold them deeply; the

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role of altruism in society, for example.In any course, a lecturer may do well to pause and ask students to reflect briefly in writing, "If X is true, then how does that lead to Y?"

The applications across the curriculum are as varied as the ingenuity of any teacher will allow. Writing as learning is appropriate wherever and whenever thinking in a course is valued as well as the repetition of knowledge for evaluation.

Writing as a Special Way of Learning

The third point addresses the question, "Why is writing stressed as a way of learning?" The question may well be, "Why is writing stressed as a special way of learning?" According to Dr. Janet Emig in "Writing as a Mode of Learning" there are several reasons. First, writing is multi-modal; it involves the eye, hand, and brain. Physiologically we are engaged when we write visually, physically, and symbolically. Once the pen moves along the paper, that apparently simple activity results in complex physiological behavior.

A second reason Dr. Emig offers is that the whole brain is engaged when we write; the non-rational, intuitive faculties as well as the rational. The less dominant hemisphere is engaged, the one that processes holistically and simultaneously, as well as the dominant hemisphere, the one that processes analytically and linearly. More than any other intellectual activity, she suggests, writing involves

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the whole brain in synthesis and analysis.

The consequences and discoveries of writing are intriguing, even exhilarating when they're experienced. Often the process stimulated by writing doesn't stop when we stop writing. Two examples are the ideas that keep coming after we've handed in an exam essay, and the eureka that comes to us after we've slept on a problem that's blocking us in our writing.

A third reason for the power of writing as a way of learning is that it becomes connected to what students already know and then carries them beyond, to speculation and discovery. Because students are active when they write, because they are not merely receiving someone else's meaning, they must incorporate the self, an important stimulus to all learning and inherently individual.

One final reason for the power of writing as learning is that it results in a record of our thoughts, a record more efficient than memory because a written text can hold more, and hold it longer, than memory. And lo and behold! We have <u>something</u> to work with; something to reorder, clarify, develop. Once we write, once we put our thoughts on paper, we are bound to move forward. According to this theory of writing we know more after we write than before we write.

Correctness

Fortunately, incorporating writing as a way of learning need not lead to a greater amount of correcting, although it may lead to a greater amount of correctness. First of all,

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although correctness is not a direct goal of writing-across-the-curriculum, improved writing ability is a valuable by-product. Research, as well as common sense, tells us that continual practice of those writing skills will improve them, just as regular skating can improve our capacity for skating. The teacher does not have to edit every text for grammatical and spelling errors, and the writing will improve.

A second issue here is the issue of the evaluation of ideas in the text. Incorporating writing as learning should not mean more evaluation. The point here, remember, is the free speculative engagement of the student in the writing process. The possibility of evaluation and correcting will in fact inhibit the speculative process. Students are then writing for the evaluator; they are then more critical of themselves as they write and therefore less speculative.

The Two Selves of the Writer

It's important to separate the two selves of the writer. Our first self is our composing self, our creative, open , exploratory self. Our second self is the critical self. In this role we are editors and judges of our own product. It can be agreed that to write effectively we must call both selves into play,but not always and not simultaneously. Sometimes it can be enough to write merely to think on paper.

The response of the teacher to such writing may be to have selected student papers read to the class for

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discussion. Or students may do all their writing in a journal and have them checked once at midterm and once at the final, a check which can involve the teacher in spot reading. Sometimes speculative writing can be a forerunner to writing on a test, or to a finished paper where evaluation is certainly appropriate. There are many ways of responding that are neither time-consuming nor involving grading. And once we recognize the fact that the students are in part writing for themselves, that they own the text, then we feel more comfortable with sometimes foregoing evaluation for the sake of continuing a speculative process.

What writing-across-the-curriculum is fundamentally about is the belief that writing should have a role in every course, not only to communicate to the teacher what has been learned, but also to enable the student to think critically on paper. What writing-across-the-curriculum is about is matching the learning process with the way our minds function best.

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Who / How / Why / What

Olivia Bissell

This article describes what happened in our faculty groups at Somerset County College. First, though, a bit of history. When we began writing our grant proposal, we kept our ultimate goal firmly in mind: namely, the Somerset County College students who would benefit by experiencing writing as a way of learning as well as communicating in all their courses. To reach that student-centered goal, we designed a three-year grant to involve every one of our ninety member faculty in a series of ten weekly two-hour workshops so that first, they could experience process-oriented writing; second, discover its potential for learning; and finally, use writing for learning in their classrooms.

Once we completed writing our grant, we began to worry seriously over whether faculty would enroll in the workshops and how they would react to us as workshop leaders if they did. On reporting day in August, when the grant was announced and faculty learned that each participant would receive released time, we still worried and imagined this verbal onslaught, "Who do these English teachers think they are, trying to rope us into teaching their subject. We don't ask them to teach them our subjects; whey should we teach writing?" To put it mildly, our institutional image caused us grave concern. We had a high profile while our only protection was our strong commitment to process-oriented writing as a way of learning for <u>every student</u>, <u>in every course</u>, <u>in every discipline</u>.

When we review our experience, we see that curiosity and an equivocal acceptance characterized the faculty participants' attitudes when we met for the first time. The participants ranked from

instructor to professor, and included at least one department chairperson. Figure 1. shows the groups by discipline.

W H O

GROUP 1	GROUP 2	GROUP 3
Data Processing	Psychology	Mathematics (2)
Business (2)	Data Processing	Chemistry
Secretarial Science	Fine Arts	Secretarial Science
Nursing	Physical Education	Data Processing
Sociology	Secretarial Science	
Mathematics	Nursing	

Figure 1.

At our first meeting, we previewed the four phases of our workshops, outlining the ten-week progression toward writing applications in classroom assignments. (See Figure 2)

H O W

I. Writing as Process

II. Connecting Writing With Teaching and Learning

III. Writing and Standards of Critical Thinking

IV. Writing Applications Across the Curriculum

Figure 2.

At our first meeting, we also previewed the objectives of our program (Figure 3) and later, during the ten-week series, frequently restated those objectives as we put them into practice.

W H Y

#1. To engage in writing so that they experience writi g as a way of discovering meaning and not only communicating meaning.

#2. To become informed about the vital role of writing as a mode of learning.

#3.Todevelop strategies and writing assignments that incorporate writing acorss the curriculum.

#4.To discover processes of thought common across the curriculum.

#5. To clarify standards of effective writing and thinking, and to assume responsibility for reinforcing those standards.

#6.To diagnose student writing problems, and prescribe strategies to overcome those problems.

Figure 3.

Throughout the ten meetings, we followed a weekly pattern illustrated in Figure 4.

W H A T

Weekly Pattern

A. Free Writing in Response To an Assigned Topic

B. Sharing Writing Aloud and Responding

C. Discussing Reading Assignments and/or Student

Weekly Assignments

A. Reading an Assigned Article

B. Writing a Response to the Article

C. Writing a Self-Assigned Journal Entry

Figure 4.

Our first twenty-minute free-writing exercise was on the topic WHO ARE MY INTELLECTUAL ANCESTORS? Then, each writer, including the workshop leaders, read aloud and received immediate responses from the others. During the free writing, our aim was to get as much on paper as possible without concern for the conventions of grammar, spelling, and punctuation, those paralyzing agents that often prevent a record of our thought from reaching the paper.

Further examples of those free-writing topics include:

1. Describe an intellectual journey -- how you arrived, where you arrived;

2. A memorable student from whom you have learned;

3. Write about the discipline most like your own, then the discipline least like yours;

4. Describe an effective teacher, then an ineffective teacher you have had;

5. What intellectual capabilities characterize the educated person?

In response to this way of free, speculative writing, a participant observed in a journal entry:

> Process writing is a tool I have only recently discovered is valuable for my own problem-solving efforts. So much effort "in the head" to understand and solve a tough problem goes round in circles. Perhaps, because I cannot go back and reflect on earlier thoughts. But on paper, connections are made, revelations of my own biases and roadblocks are made - even if there are no instant answers, there is deeper understanding of the issues.

Each week for homework, participants wrote for fifteen minutes about the assigned reading and also for fifteen minutes on a self-chosen topic. Those journal entries often provoked spirited

discussions that involved educational theory, teaching strategies, and personal experiences, always with writing as the integral connection. The following quote about one of the assigned articles shows how a faculty member made connections in a journal entry:

> I like the discussion of writing in the article which focuses on learning as a process of making relationships and connections between ideas. Seeing learning in this ... certainly leads us to view writing as a valuable tool in the process.

Later, in the discussion of the same reading assignment, the writer commented that journal writing could help her students integrate and synthesize the tremendous amount of new data in the Fundamentals of Nursing course she teaches. That concern for students' ability to integrate all the new data of a content course forced us all to take a close look at how writing helps students learn what we are trying to teach.

To connect writing with teaching and learning, we began analyzing our classroom writing assignments and, as opportunities presented themselves, we began experimenting with new approaches. A physical education instructor asked students to write an essay on how to score a volley ball game. In psychology lectures, an instructor stopped during twenty-minute lectures and asked students to write questions or reactions which the class addressed at the end of the presentation. A mathematics instructor asked students to write definitions of such terms as "subset", "equivalence", and "finite set". The same instructor called for the students to identify in writing their areas of confusion in a number systems course. Later, in a journal entry, that instructor described how one of our project readings helped change the mathematics assignment just mentioned:

> The students are having a lot of difficulty with the first chapter because they have never worked with sets before. It is all new, and they are confused - even the students who are diligently doing their homework and reading every page of the chapter. After I spent the whole class time reviewing, they seemed to understand it more clearly and I reassigned the same homework. Then, while reading the article, I decided to ask students to explain the difference between some of the terms instead of just giving the definition of each one.

In a later journal entry, that instructor commented on one of the readings as follows:

> This article helped me realize that I was asking students to draw a Venn diagram for the complement of the intersection of two sets when they didn't have a grasp of what "complement" or "intersection" were. It's true that students learn how to do problems without really understanding what they're doing.

That journal entry shows a change in a faculty member's perception of teaching and learning as well as a change in practice, using writing by students for clarification and mastery of the subject, a change brought about by faculty reading, writing, and talking together about how to foster learning.

Our experience showed the value of collecting journal entries each week, reading and responding to them, and quickly returning them to the participants. That dialogue, established the first week, showed the participants the power of an immediate, non-judgmental response to their writing, and also demonstrated that even without grades, responses are valued.

In phase two of the program, our focus was teaching and learning. Participants' discussions considered our practice of freewriting for discovery, our new perspectives about learning from the readings, and connections with our classroom teaching. Besides devising new teaching strategies involving writing, each group brainstormed a list

of teaching and learning components. Figure 5 is a composite of the lists from our three groups.

TEACHING AND LEARNING COMPONENTS

	TEACHING	LEARNING
1.	Communicating	Connecting With What is Already Known
2.	Questioning/Discovering	Questioning/Discovering
3.	Presenting Modes of Inquiry Characteristic to Each Discipline	Implementing Modes of Inquiry
4.	Providing Challenges, Taking Risks	Taking Risks
5.	Presenting Alternative Viewpoints	Seeing and Understanding Different Perspectives
6.	Developing and Maintaining Standards	Meeting Standards

Figure 5.

Once our lists were compiled, we noted the enactive effect of writing in all disciplines. Our clarified perception about teaching and learning prepared us for our next task: to discover processes of thought common across the curriculum. The free-writing assignment we selected involved the following 10-minute writing steps:

1. Choose a natural object from a collection of cones, shells, and twigs;
2. Observe the object closely, then describe it in detail, writing for 10 minutes;
3. Write for 10 minutes, developing a comparison/contrast;
4. Then, choose a second object.

Participants enjoyed this writing task and appreciated the inherent critical thinking skills including observing, inferring, and

questioning, processes of thought common in all disciplines and dependent on close observation, the basis of this exercise.

The next phase of our work to implement student writing for learning involved us in analyzing a student essay in order to identify the writing problems before establishing common standards of critical thinking for all our disciplines. Our participants read and evaluated student essays for evidence of critical thinking and effective writing. In order to do this, they read the student essay, listed acceptable qualities, identified unacceptable areas, and then ranked problem areas from most serious to least serious.

When we discussed our individual evaluations, we discovered a consensus that we then formalized into cross-disciplinary guidelines for writing and standards of critical thinking.

The final phase of our writing program involved the outcomes. Of paramount importance, because they implemented writing by students, are the writing strategies toward which our whole effort was directed. Here are examples, from faculty members assignments:

A Fine Arts instructor -- "Each week students are presented with a piece of pottery to write about. I want them to evaluate and see a piece of pottery." Later the instructor commented -- "These short writings give me a fuller picture of what and how well the students are learning about clay and artistic expression through clay ..."

An Accounting instructor -- Write about the difference between terms, "asset" and "liability".

A Sociology instructor -- Describe how your life would be different if you were a member of the opposite sex today. Would your life be better or worse? Why?

A Secretarial Science instructor -- Write about your learning experience with the Wang Word Processor.

A Nursing instructor -- A written journal by nursing students about the emotional development of the maternity cases they studied that correlated with the journal on physical development.

Another outcome of our workshops was the knowledge we shared about writing and critical thinking skills across the curriculum. The cross-pollination value of writing as a way of discovery and learning surfaced during an English class when a nursing student explained the difference between the subjective (personal) and the objective (academic) writing modes, a distinction that the English students needed to clarify in order to develop a writing assignment in the academic mode. Earlier in the semester, an assignment for a nursing course had required the objective observations of a hospital patient and the instructor had prepared guidelines that showed students how to distinguish between subjective and objective observations. Thus, the nursing student's experiential/academic experience of writing related directly to the English class assignment, and that experience helped answer fellow students' questions.

An ongoing outcome of our workshops: faculty members who have developed new insights about writing and planned new writing strategies for their students' intellectual growth. This reflection by one of the participants shows what happened:

> "At first we were new to the idea that writing contributes to learning. It took time to get our minds off the notion that grammar should be stressed, grade all of the assignments given to students, concentrate on product and ignore process. When we got over those hard and fast rules, we were free to listen to what was being said about writing as a process, and it made sense. We did free writing and read articles about using journal entries to help

> students clarify their thoughts and understanding of the content. We became eager to try out our newly acquired knowledge. I tried a writing assignment with my students last week. It occurred to me that the quality of the teacher-prepared assignment--question, problem, etc.-- will set the tone for the level of response received from the student. That is to say, if I give the student something to respond to which only requires that the student answer with a low-level response, then I am really not doing anything to encourage or to help develop higher cognitive functions for that student. Also, doing it as I did was a spontaneous reaction to preparing a writing assignment. I developed it on the spot and had the students respond. Should my writing assignments be structured and planned so that I make sure that I move from the simple to the complex? Do I ask simpler questions in the beginning and then move up to compare and contrast/analyze, synthesize, and then evaluation? To me, this sounds correct, but it requires a great deal of thought on my part (as the teacher) with the learning objective set for my students clearly in mind.

One final outcome -- faculty members who share personal and professional bonds created by writing.

At the conclusion of one year, it was important for us to ask ourselves what have we accomplished. What lessons have we learned from this program . . . and what are the implications, the benefits, for students, faculty and the institution?

LESSON NUMBER ONE

Literate communication through effective writing must be identified and supported as a college-wide student outcome: the achievement of this outcome requires total college involvement.

The implications of this statement go far beyond our recognizing that we, as educators, want our students to be literate communicators, a concept so full of meaning that it is often misused to mean more and less than it does. For us, writing is an exercise in literacy: an expression of how we think, how we feel and how we judge. But we can no longer assume that because we teach writing and composition and require students to write that it follows that they will become effective writers. What we and many other institutions have realized is that in order for students to write with clarity, and meaning, and hopefully, style, they must be given many opportunities to learn how to write - to practice writing and to refine their abilities as writers. Therefore, it makes sense to teach writing directly in composition courses, but also to continue to use writing in all courses so that students will have the opportunity to develop their skills in writing. There is not a subject taught nor a discipline entrenched in the curriculum that should fail to provide students with continuing practice in writing. If indeed, we think an AA degree means that its holders are literate communicators, then the ability to

write effectively is a desired student outcome and writing must be recognized and supported as an institutional priority.

Practically speaking, this means writing is integral to all courses; all faculty must become involved and administrators must be willing to make available the resources, the time,and the staff to support such an endeavor. In real terms, this can be difficult to accomplish. At a time when resources are scarce, and there are many competing priorities, the idea of total college commitment to an effort of this kind may seem financially unrealistic for many colleges. But such a project need not be costly. Most of you have some type of faculty development program and this may be a way to offset a portion of the cost, if not all of it. Faculty contracts may provide another, since most faculty contracts contain provisions for professional growth and/or faculty release time. In our case, we sought outside funding to cover the cost of release time for faculty participants and workshop leaders. The ratio of outside support to institutional support is approximately 2 to 1. In an institution of our size, in which the goal is to involve all full-time teaching faculty and all adjunct English faculty, the cost in real dollars will be approximately $35,000 per year for a three-year period. This may sound high to some of you, but I would hasten to say that the pay-offs are quickly realized. Almost one-third of our faculty, representing all departments, have started to integrate writing into their courses and some use a form of writing in almost every class session. In addition, these same faculty participants will be giving one hour per week next year to the College Writing Center, assisting students and working with tutors.

But beyond the resource issue, a more critical question is how to involve faculty? Perhaps the most important step in bringing about academic change is achieving agreement on the existence of a problem. As Myrna noted earlier, the writing ability of students or the lack thereof is one of those problems where you will find almost unanimous agreement that the problem exists - "students in my classes can't write." I would suggest stopping there; otherwise, you will find yourself engaging in an endless lengthy debate with the faculty as to <u>why</u> students can't write!

From the inception of the project, our goal was to involve <u>all</u> faculty. Faculty were <u>invited</u> to participate and a minimum of two volunteers were requested from each academic department, except the English Department. The reason for excluding the latter was to eliminate for other faculty participants any possibility of feeling threatened by the presence of the English faculty, who after all are perceived as the effective writers as well as the experts in teaching writing. There was also considerable interest expressed by administrators to be included in the groups and they too were excluded for the reason that their presence might be inhibiting or intimidating to members of the faculty.

Working with the academic department chairs, the workshop leaders met with the departmental faculty and presented an overview of the workshops, addressed questions and concerns, and invited volunteers. Faculty reasons for volunteering were probably as varied as the faculty members themselves, ranging from curiosity, concern about student writing, the incentive of release time, opportunity to learn new teaching strategies, and to improve their own writing.

Involving the faculty from all academic departments rather than working with only faculty members from one or two academic departments was a conscious decision on our part, because we felt that it was necessary for the faculty to see and experience writing as common and integral to all disciplines. We also intuitively felt that if we attempted to work with only one department at a time, our chances for success would be diminished because of the possibility of a resistance from one or more influential faculty members within a given department; and further, we could also reduce the possibility of competition occurring between faculty members within a department. In retrospect, our hunch was probably correct, because in the beginning, certain individual senior faculty members from one or two departments were skeptical, biased and reluctant to fully participate in the workshop experience; however, by the end they were believers. The last advantage and perhaps one of the most significant for mixing the departments, was that the faculty participants in this year's groups became the chief recruiters for next year's volunteers. This informal network set the stage for the self-generation of the effort. In fact, some departments had more volunteers than there were slots available for the 85-86 academic year. Faculty enthusiasm and commitment which evolved as a result of their positive experience proved a critical determinant for perpetuating the success of the project.

LESSON NUMBER TWO

To improve student writing, the faculty must be influenced first, the students second.

Faculty who experience writing as an active process of inquiry rather than just a product are then better able to replicate or apply

that experience in a classroom setting. For some faculty this occurs quickly, for others it is slow and for a few it may never happen. The notion of using exploratory, speculative, informal or personal writing to help students both to learn better and to write better is very unsettling for many faculty who learned writing as a soley way to inform, instruct, or persuade someone about something. For some faculty, issues of correctness, grammar, spelling, punctuation did impede their ability to engage in writing as a process. A process-oriented approach to writing is difficult for many faculty who have spent much of their career focusing on the product. It is not surprising that they would have similar expectations for student writing. It takes time to make a new idea part of one's repertoire, and for many faculty it means unlearning or relearning. This is generally the course of the resistance shown by faculty. Workshops must be flexible and offer a variety of strategies, practices and techniques to permit participants to experiment and adapt those strategies that suit their personalities and pedagogy. A group experience that focuses first on personal writing and feedback, then moves to participants sharing how they use writing in various courses and then assessing the results of its use in the classroom provides structure to experiment, and to try various techniques in different courses.

A word here about the workshop leaders is appropriate. Selection of the right faculty to conduct the workshops is critical to the success or failure of any college-wide writing-across-the-curriculum project. It's an open-ended model designed to stimulate, to inform and ultimately to change attitudes about writing. It is essential that you select faculty who are themselves process-oriented teachers.

If I were to describe my colleagues, I would say they are committed not zealous; supportive but firm; and above all secure and willing to let their colleagues explore, experiment, and evolve their own conclusions about writing. Rank, tenure, experience, and publications are not critical for selection, but being comfortable and secure to participate with the group and facilitate learning is.

LESSON NUMBER THREE

Faculty who engage in the process of writing are able to experience personally the connection between writing and learning and the value of writing in their own discipline.

Writing workshops must focus on the experiential first; therefore, the workshop experiences were designed to stress the same concepts one would use with students in the classroom:

1) that the active nature of writing highlighting the process as equally important with the final product.

2) that writing does not necessarily follow clear precise steps but instead goes back and forth - adding, taking away, revising, and beginning anew.

3) that writing is a way of thinking and learning, not just articulating what is known.

4) that the process of writing is translatable to the language of all disciplines not just English or the Humanities but Nursing, Computer Science, Electronics Technology and Math.

5) that the goal for faculty is to enable students to communicate in writing about their disciplines and that the active process of writing will challenge the students to clarify their thinking, to explore alternatives, to work out solutions to

problems, all in addition to, or in the process of conveying conclusions. This process-oriented approach that focuses on inquiry and problem-solving offers alternatives to faculty who have traditionally structured their courses to impart information and content.

LESSON NUMBER FOUR

Faculty are receptive to change when the focus of change is students and learning.

Faculty resistance to new ideas is often regarded as a self-evident truth to many of us in administration. This is at best, I believe, a half truth. Faculty are typically skeptics especially when it comes to new ideas - or "fads"; and they, like many of us, often feel overworked, underpaid, often criticized and seldom recognized, and they question whether this new idea is going to accomplish much except give them more work. But on the whole, faculty are concerned about their students and learning, and this project has as its primary focus or goal the development of students as writers. It is a student-centered goal as opposed to a faculty-centered goal. Generally, faculty perceptions about the project were positive because it was not implied that they weren't doing their job, but instead, how could they assist students to achieve.

However, there were concerns about the project. They focused on such issues as - how could it be implemented? Would it be successful - would st dents' writing improve? However, most of the faculty resistance was confined to their concern for obtaining a finished product that was correct and included such things as standard English usage, correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc. But as faculty

were able to experience and share their progress personally and see successes in their classrooms, their skepticism diminished. There is nothing like the enthusiasm generated for ideas that work and that yield positive results - and albeit gradual change is occurring.

LESSON NUMBER FIVE

Innovation and short-term attitude changes do not necessarily generate long-term pedagogical changes.

The experience of other similar projects warned us that to sustain the initial intensity and commitment of a writing-across-the-curriculum project without follow-up is naive. Follow-up is one aspect of the program we gave little real thought to when initiating the project - our concern then was participation. However, to achieve our institutional goal of having writing become a regular part of every class, we realize now, inspite of our immediate successes, that this project like many other good ideas may ultimately fail if we don't take the time to reinforce it and reward it over time.

At the conclusion of the semester workshops, faculty participants requested the opportunity to continue to meet in subsequent semesters; they wanted an informal on-going dialogue. Like students, they too wanted feedback and reinforcement. It's heartening to have this challenge! Our plan is to structure and schedule follow-up sessions in ensuing semesters. We are hopeful these sessions combined with faculty participation in the writing center will provide the reinforcement necessary to sustain the change that has already occurred, as well as promote further the goal of improving student writing.

LESSON NUMBER SIX

Through a common college-wide experience, it is possible to generate consensus about what constitutes an acceptable standard for college level writng.

I think most of you here today would concur that people can agree more readily about problems than solutions. If we as an institution had decided the first step toward improving student writing was to develop a college-wide standard, I am sure we would have had nothing to report today. Such a change would have been debated in the abstract; become bogged down in some committee or department; undergone revision after revision, accommodating everyone's bias, concern, or pet theory until months later there would have emerged a statement. But real consensus and support would have been unlikely. The point is that out of each separate workshop there has emerged from the faculty a common set of criteria or standards for acceptable college-level writing. We believe this process has given meaning and integrity to having a common standard for college-level writing, and the experience of the process has fostered a consensus of thinking about writing.

As you can see from our discussion here today, the benefits that accrue to the institution reach beyond our initial central concern for improving students' writing ability viewed in the larger context: writing is providing for faculty a new perspectivs on learning.

The writing workshops have created a forum for dialogue: the intellectual stimulation necessary for faculty to begin to explore ways in which the classroom environment can challenge students to think, to analyze, and to solve problems, rather than just recount facts and information.

Faculty are recognizing that learning the processes involved in thinking and communicating are common across their disciplines. Whether students are explaining in writing the debugging of a computer operating system; the preparation of a nursing care plan for a patient; or, the objective literary analysis of a Flannery O'Connor short story, they are required to draw conclusions based on observing, questioning, and inferring. Thus, the distinctions between disciplines become blurred, less compartmentalized, less discrete.

Faculty have also demonstrated a greater appreciation and understanding of the teaching/learning relationships, one anothers disciplines, teaching styles and of problems encountered in the classroom. And perhaps most important, faculty have begun to see themselves as part of a larger academic community. The opportunity for faculty to interact regularly in the workshops has brought into focus substantive issues related to what faculty do - that is teach, and they have increased the faculty members' sense of individual and shared responsibility for student learning.

As one faculty member puts it -

> "It's really good to know there are faculty in other departments trying to do the same thing in their classes as I am."

By designing learning experiences involving writing, practice, and feedback, we see students developing the general ability to communicate in writing and to assess their own writing. We see students becoming more proficient in their ability to communicate within a given course or discipline.

When writing is used as a tool for learning, it becomes a means for developing the thinking skills that are common across all

disciplines. A nursing student in English II recounted this experience -

> When I was working on my English II assignment of literary analysis, I realized that I was doing the same thing as I had done for my writing assignments in nursing, when I had to separate my subjective responses from objective observations of patients.

This is an essential-evident connection -- the kind of connections we want students to be able to make in all disciplines and programs.

When students are presented with appropriately challenging learning tasks that lead to ideas and skills that will make a difference in their lives, they develop a positive attitude toward learning.

The lessons we have learned and the outcomes we have shared with you today, result from less than two years of experience. Yet, I believe the program has already demonstrated its impact on faculty and students alike.

As we look back on our thinking about writing, we see the growth of our thought and practices as an unfolding series of arguments.

In conclusion, I want to emphasize that I believe that we can succeed in reassuring the importance and integrity of writing and communication if we take seriously our responsibility as educators to change some of the formal structures of education into what we believe to be good education for students.

Going back to Myrna's original question - How does a college faculty find ways to teach what they believe is important for students to learn? I believe this program has provided our college with a process for initiating and implementing academic change that focuses not upon new courses or curricula, but on the educational achievement

of students - the acquisition of those abilities - thinking and communicating common to all areas of study.

I hope what we have begun at Somerset will stimulate others to act similarly on the basis of our equally strong optimism.

CONCLUSION Myrna Smith

Thank you Barbara. I want to emphasize a benefit that she referred to, and felt strongly by the three of us who led the writing groups. That was the discovery of how deeply our colleagues are involved with and committed to their teaching. I found that many faculty members think a great deal about their teaching and want to do the best that they possibly can. Almost all the members of our groups were open to change if there was evidence that it would help their students.

Barbara also mentioned that it is possible to come to a college-wide consensus about what constitutes standards. Because our own standards have not yet been put into final form, we are giving you, at the end of today's session, a two-page statement that was prepared by the faculty of Montclair State, a four-year college in New Jersey. Their's called, "Standards for Formal Written Work," is divided into five sections: 1) Writing and Thinking 2) The Writing Process 3) Library Research and Documentation 4) Standard Engish, Grammar, Style and 5) Mechanics and Appearance.

Another college, Calfornia State at San Bernadino, came up with a simpler formula, one the entire faculty agreed upon. Their's is represented by the acronym SOME, substance, organization, mechanics, and evidence. We at Somerset are working towards something in between. Currently we have our list divided into two sections: the first is the mental operations involved in writing which apply across the curriculum. These include: observing, ordering, generalizing, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating. The second is the criteria for college level writing. These include substance and purpose,

organization, unity and coherence, evidence, standard English usage and mechanics, and style that is appropriate and clear for the intended audience. Essentially we want to emphasize in our teaching the mental operations so that we can receive from students written work that has the standards on the second list.

We have some handouts for you, but first we would like to open the floor for questions.

Questions Questions Questions Questions Questions

We have four handouts for you. The first is a statement of standards developed by the faculty at Montclair State College in New Jersey that I referred to earlier. We think theirs is excellent. Secondly, we have Janet Emig's seminal article, "Writing as a Mode of Learning," which gives the basic theoretical background for our work. We also have Richard Fresinger's article "Cross-Disciplinary Writing Programs: Beginnings," which gives the history of the writing across the curriculum movement. Finally, we have an annotated bibliography that appeared in Current Issues in Higher Education published by the American Association of Higher Education. Please help yourself to these four. We thank you all for coming.

ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE FOR
JUNIOR COLLEGES
AUGUST 28, 1985